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Most discussions about notions of authority and dissent in early modern Europe usually imply those embedded in Christian traditions, whether Protestant or Catholic. To address these same issues from the perspective of Jewish culture in early modern Europe is to consider the subject from a relatively different vantage point. The small Jewish communities of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries were shaped in manifold ways by the norms and values of the Christian and Moslem host civilizations to which they belonged. Yet, they were also heirs to powerful rabbinic religious and political traditions that structured their social relationships and shaped their attitudes towards divine law, human responsibility, communal discipline, and authority. To examine their universe of discourse in its proper context is to view it both in its own cultural terms and in its dialogue and negotiation with the non-Jewish world.

No period in Jewish cultural history has undergone more radical reformulation and revision by recent scholarship than the early modern; though to what extent conventional schemes of periodization like "early modern," "Renaissance," or "baroque" can be meaningfully applied to the Jewish cultural experience is a question which still engenders much discussion and debate.[1] Equally problematic is a proper evaluation of the kabbalah, the traditions of Jewish mystical and esoteric experience,

1. For recent discussions of the meaning of the Renaissance and baroque when applied to Jewish culture, see D. B. Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations and Forms*, 3 vols., ed. A. Rabil Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), vol. 1, 382-433; H. Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Culture in Renaissance Italy: A Methodological Survey," *Italia* 9 (1990): 63-96; G. Sermonetta, "Aspetti del pensiero moderno nell' ebraismo tra Rinascimento e eta barocca," in *Italia Judaica* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1986), vol. 2, 17-35; D. B. Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York-London: New York University Press, 1992), especially the introduction; and the various essays in *Jewish Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. D.B. Ruderman (Los Angeles-Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For "early modern," see J. I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

which appear to dominate the cultural landscape of European Jewry during this period in a dramatic and unprecedented manner.[2] It is my contention that the impact of the kabbalah on Jewish society and culture is not only a critical component in defining the distinct characteristics of this period in Jewish history, but it also has much to contribute to the question of how religious authority can be subverted by powerful voices within its own tradition. It also serves to elucidate how the restructuring of religious and social attitudes, generally associated with that transition from medievalism to modernity, paradoxically might be engendered by forces unleashed by the tradition itself.

Before mapping those transformations triggered by the kabbalah, we must first address a critical problem of definition: To what extent was the kabbalah an organic and integral part of rabbinic tradition? Was it truly a tradition (literally, *kabbalah*) coterminous with that of the rabbis and the normative structure of classical Judaism, or was it rather a more recent creation of thirteenth-century mystics in Provence and Catalonia responding negatively to the illegitimate and unwarranted usurpation of Jewish religious culture by Moses Maimonides and the philosophical exponents of Judaism? And beyond the issue of longevity, does the kabbalah represent a continuity with the past or a rupture? Does it confirm and buttress traditional authority or ultimately undermine and subvert it? To begin to answer these questions is to enter directly into a veritable maelstrom of recent controversy surrounding the influential historical reconstruction of the kabbalah by the late Gershom Scholem. Let us situate ourselves at the relatively safe fringes of this heated exchange by focusing primarily on those points of agreement among the dissenting parties.

It was Scholem who first described the way of the mystic in general and in Judaism in particular as two-fold.[3] On the one hand, the mystic represents the arch-conservative, attempting to rediscover the sources of traditional authority of the religious faith-community and constantly aligning a personal spiritual experience within the framework of conventional symbols and ideas. This is exemplified in Judaism by the centrality of the *halakha*, the Jewish normative structure, within the mystic life. The kabbalist performs *miẓvot*, religious obligations, not only for personal benefit but to enhance and fortify the powers of the Divine. In

2. The debate, as mentioned below, revolves around the pioneering scholarship of Gershom Scholem, especially his classic *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941). The most comprehensive critique of his position is that of M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1988). See most recently, Y. Liebes, "New Trends in the Study of the Kabbalah" [Hebrew], forthcoming.

3. I refer especially to his classic essays, "Religious Authority and Mysticism," and "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1965), 5-31, 32-86. See also Scholem, *Major Trends*, 1-39; "Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 282-303.

other words, a person's heightened spirituality reinforces the sense of obligation to live faithfully within the normative parameters of rabbinic law. The mystic, in contrast to the philosopher, is also at home in the imaginative fantasies of rabbinic homily, the *aggadah*, unperturbed by their chaotic and unsystematic nature and unembarrassed by their often irrational and anthropomorphic discourse. On the contrary, they offer untapped resources for personal flights of fancy, to galvanize the psychic energies of one's own soaring imagination, one's own depictions of the supernal world. And in the world of traditional ritual and prayer surrounding the sabbath and the holy days, the kabbalist discovers the most effective medium to meditate and uplift the soul, to infuse it with the mysteries of the divine.[4]

But Scholem also emphasized another face of the mystic: a revolutionary posture, a desire to transform the content of the tradition in which the person operates, to reinterpret it and even to establish a new authority antithetical to the old. Since the divine words of the revelation are filled with infinite meanings uniquely accessible to the attentive ear of the individual interpreter, the stability and enduring coherence of the divine message is constantly called into question by the mystic who views the divine words and letters in constantly shifting patterns and configurations like a whirling kaleidoscope. The mystic holds steadfastly to a sacred text deemed fixed and immutable but at the same time is prepared to subject it to the most radical exegesis, to transform it into a virtual *corpus symbolicum* which paradoxically undermines the very permanence it seemingly aspires to preserve.[5] It is this dialectical pattern, a simultaneous reinforcement and subversion of traditional values, that defines the unique contribution of kabbalah to the history of Judaism. To Scholem, the kabbalah ventilated the stuffy air of classical Judaism, watered the petrifying and desiccating forces of rabbinic legalism, and fertilized the stodgy and cerebral rabbinic mind with mythic vision and creative renewal.[6]

Among the many points of contention between Scholem and his most conspicuous critic Moshe Idel, it is this last point that Idel targets for special assault. Idel contends that Scholem distorts the relationship of the kabbalah to rabbinic Judaism because of his inadequate understanding of the latter, out of which the former emerged. For Idel, the kabbalah did not have to overcome dialectically the deficiencies of rabbinic Judaism since the rabbis' fertile religious imagination was not as lacking as

4. See also, "Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists," in *The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 118-57.

5. Besides the aforementioned works of Scholem, see on this point, Moshe Idel, "Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1986), 141-57.

6. See also Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, especially "The Crisis of Tradition in Jewish Messianism," 49-77.

Scholem describes it. Myth for Idel and for another young critic, Yehudah Leibes, was an integral part of rabbinic Judaism; it was not necessary to "import" it from gnostic or Neoplatonic sources since it was long implanted at the religion's very core. From its very inception, rabbinic Judaism embodied mythic, magical, and even mystical dimensions that provided the seedbed for the reemergence of the spiritual revival in the kabbalistic schools of the thirteenth century. Thus, for Idel, the kabbalah was never perceived as an innovation when it appeared in the Middle Ages—it never evoked serious critique or opposition. Rather, it constituted a mere restructuring of those aspects of rabbinic thought denied authenticity by the philosophically minded followers of Maimonides and a conscious program to correct the distortions they had seemingly introduced into Judaism. In other words, the thrust of Idel's interpretation is to de-emphasize the dialectical posture of the kabbalah with respect to normative Judaism, to underscore its deep affinity with the tradition, and to understate its revolutionary and self-destructive potential.[7]

For Scholem, the kabbalah unleashed its most explosive bombardment on the tradition in the early modern period. The primary catalysts were the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the depression and trauma that dislocation engendered, and the deep-felt need to provide a comprehensive and inspired response to overcome the pangs history had wrought. According to Scholem, the response came through the coadunation of mysticism and messianism in the religious ideology of Isaac Luria of Safed. This sixteenth-century mystic provided the ideological underpinnings for the most dramatic challenge to normative Judaism since the time of Paul, that is, for the messiahship of the seventeenth-century Shabbatai Ẓevi, his conversion to Islam, and the nihilistic radicalism of Ẓevi's followers, the Dönmeh and the Frankists, well into the eighteenth century. The Dönmeh followed their master's example by converting to Islam while denying all conventional mores; the Frankists, in the eighteenth century, followed their ideological founder, Jacob Frank, into Christianity, but were soon branded as heretics by both Christian and Jewish authorities.[8] Idel (and Leibes) have disputed Scholem's reconstruction on several key points. Their alternative interpretations shall not detain us here, but remind us that our understanding of this momentous period in Jewish history is very much in a state of flux and that one major challenge in clarifying its very nature revolves around the ambiguity of grasping the kabbalah as both a conservative force and one of cultural

7. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, especially chaps. 7 and 10; and Y. Leibes, "De Natura Dei: Jewish Myth and Its Transfigurations" [Hebrew], in *Memorial Volume in Honor of Ephraim Gottleib*, ed. A. Oron and A. Goldreich (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1992).

8. Scholem presents his position in the last three chapters of *Major Trends*, in *The Messianic Idea*, especially pp. 78-141, and in his *Sabbatai Ṣevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

and social change.[9]

It is this question I would like to consider from a more focused perspective in reflecting on the theme of orthodoxy and subversion in the early modern period. In the context of this limited presentation I shall examine briefly three distinct but related contexts in which the kabbalah figured prominently in subverting traditional attitudes and norms of behavior.

My first example is the setting of Pico della Mirandola's Florentine circle of Christian and Jewish associates at the end of the fifteenth century and their mutual study of Hebraic texts, particularly kabbalistic ones. The subject of Pico's syncretistic interests in Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Kabbalistic sources have been amply discussed by others, as has his shared enthusiasm with Marsilio Ficino for the notion of *prisca theologia*, or ancient theology, the idea that a common core of universal truth, a unity and harmony of religious insight, can be located within all historical periods and among disparate cultures and religious faiths. By universalizing all religious knowledge, Ficino and Pico fashioned an open and more tolerant version of Christianity; in searching for the source of universal truth in ancient cultural and religious settings distant from their own, they came to appreciate the centrality of Hebraic culture in Western civilization.[10]

Pico went beyond Ficino in assigning a prominent place to the kabbalah in his new theological system as both a source of higher knowledge and magical power as well as a powerful hermeneutical tool for decoding arcane texts. Pico believed that both the ancient pagans and Hebrews had concealed their sacred truths through a kind of "hieroglyphic" imagery of myths and fables designed to attract the attention of their following while safeguarding their esoteric character by not divulging the divine secrets. For Pico, Egidio of Viterbo, Francesco Giorgio, Cornelius Agrippa, Johann Reuchlin, and many others, the kabbalah was the key to lay bare the secrets of Judaism, to reconcile them with the mysteries of other religions and cultures so that their essential differences would ultimately be eradicated. In the hands of Pico and similarly-minded Christian scholars, the kabbalah was soon estranged from its original and

9. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, chap. 10; idem, Introduction to A.E. Eshkoli, *Ha-Tenuot ha-Meshiḥiot be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1988); idem, "One in a Town, Two in a Family: A New Look at the Problem of the Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbatianism" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 44 (1990): 5-30; idem, "Particularism and Universalism in Kabbalah, 1480-1650," in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, 323-44; Y. Leibes, "Sabbatian Messianism" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 40 (1989): 4-20; Y. Barnai, "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Background of Sabbatianism in Smyrna," *Jewish History*, forthcoming.

10. For a comprehensive discussion and recent bibliography on Pico and his Jewish associates, see Ruderman, "The Renaissance and Jewish Thought." On *prisca theologia*, see C.B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 505-23; D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972).

spiritual source in Judaism and instead confronted a new mixture of radically different associations and meanings blended together from pagan and Christian modes of thinking. As the late Chaim Wirszubski has brilliantly shown, the Jewish kabbalah was literally recast into a Christian one.[11]

The stimulation of Jews and Christians poring over arcane Hebrew texts was not one-sided, however. While the older Yohanan Alemanno probably had more to teach his young student, the count of Mirandola, than he had to learn from him, as Moshe Idel has plausibly suggested,[12] Alemanno seems to have emerged from this encounter with a unique understanding of the Jewish faith, an understanding that reflected in many of its essential features that of his Christian patron. Like Pico, Alemanno viewed the kabbalah as a kind of ancient lore to be compared and correlated with other ancient philosophies; it was fused with magic; it was explained philosophically and exoterically; and most significantly, it served a function once assigned exclusively to philosophy in the Middle Ages, as a kind of cultural bridge with the non-Jewish world. The blueprint of Alemanno became the dominant way Jewish savants studied the kabbalah in Italy well into the seventeenth century, as Idel and others have demonstrated.[13] And Italian Jews living in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were also challenged to reevaluate the supposed uniqueness of their own ancient legacy when confronted with the riches of other alien civilizations. So, Leone Ebreo could correlate rabbinic and Neoplatonic sapience, Abraham Yagel could subscribe to a genealogy of ancient philosophers copied from Agrippa, and Judah Moscato could refer to Pico's doctrine even in the framework of a public sermon.[14]

Had Jews and Christians edged closer to each other through their mutual encounter with the kabbalah? Had their shared convictions about the universality of all religious experience dissipated their long-seated antagonisms and enhanced the possibility of tolerating each other in

11. C. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, Mass.-London: Harvard University Press, 1989). For additional references, see Ruderman, "The Renaissance and Jewish Thought."

12. M. Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.-London: Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, 1983), 186-242 [reprinted in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, 107-69].

13. On this, see Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations;" "Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560 and 1660," *Italia Judaica* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1986), 243-62 [reprinted in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, 345-68]; D. B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, Mass.-London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

14. On Leone Ebreo, see, e.g., A. Lesley, "The Place of the *Dialoghi d'amore* in Contemporaneous Jewish Thought," in *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, ed. O.Z. Pugliese and K. Eisenbichler, University of Toronto Italian Studies I (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 69-86 [reprinted in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, 170-88]. On Yagel, see Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic and Science*. On Moscato, see M. Idel, "Judah Moscato, A Late Renaissance Jewish Preacher," in Ruderman, *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, 41-66.

ways never before imagined? We should not overestimate the limited impact of such encounters. We should rather recall that Pico's syncretism was more a form of Christian self-aggrandizement than toleration. And by the middle of the sixteenth century the Talmud was burned and Jews were ghettoized, pressured to convert, and subjected to the most virulent forms of anti-Semitism. Even the champion of Jewish books, Johann Reuchlin, was no friend of the Jews, as Heiko Oberman has shown.[15] Jews in the main perceived their Christian neighbors hardly as potential allies, but rather as still formidable and fearsome adversaries. Nevertheless, the kabbalah had paradoxically opened a new agenda in Jewish-Christian relations. If long-term animosities persisted, the possibility of a new appreciation of each other, no matter how slight, had surfaced.[16]

My second example of the transformative power of the kabbalah in subverting Jewish traditions is taken from the ghetto period in late sixteenth century Italy, some one hundred years after the Florentine encounter. As I have mentioned, Jewish life in the era of Counter-Reformation had been radically altered. After the public incineration of the Talmud in 1553, Jews were subjected to increased harassment, expulsion, and degradation. The most conspicuous phenomenon associated with this period was the establishment of the ghetto system all over Italy, "a compulsory segregated Jewish quarter in which all Jews were required to live and in which no Christians were allowed to live," as Benjamin Ravid has defined it.[17] The notion of the ghetto fit well into the overall policy of the post-Tridentine papacy. Through enclosure and segregation, the Catholic community could be shielded more effectively from Jewish contamination. Since Jews could be more easily controlled within a restricted neighborhood, the mass conversionary program of the papacy would prove to be more effective, and canon law could be rigidly enforced.[18]

Yet the ghetto always constituted a kind of paradox in defining the relationships between Jews and Christians in Italy. No doubt Jews were subjected to considerably more misery, impoverishment, and humiliation than before. Yet, Jewish contacts with the Christian world were hardly

15. H. Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus, and Luther," in Cooperman, *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, 326-64.

16. Cf. D. B. Ruderman, "The Hebrew Book in a Christian World," in *A Sign and a Witness: 2000 Years of Hebrew Books and Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. L. Gold (New York-Oxford: New York Public Library and Oxford University Press, 1988), 101-13.

17. B. Ravid, "The Venetian Ghetto in Historical Perspective," in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi*, ed. and trans. M. Cohen (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 283. See also K. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555-1593* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977).

18. See Stow, *Catholic Thought*; B. Ravid, "The Religious, Economic, and Social Background of the Establishment of the Ghetto in Venice," in *Gli ebrei e Venezia*, ed. G. Cozzi (Milan: Edizioni di Communita, 1987), 211-59; K. Stow, "The Consciousness of Closure: Roman Jewry and Its *Ghet*," in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, 386-400.

broken off. In fact, the ghetto, for the first time, provided Jews with a clearly defined space within Christian society, despite its obvious negative implications. The difference between being expelled and being ghettoized is the difference between having no right to live in Christian society and that of becoming an organic part of that society.

The notion of paradox is critical in Robert Bonfil's recent understanding of the cultural experience of the ghetto. Bonfil's interest is in charting the structural transformation within the cultural universe of Italian Jewry, inverting the medieval, and creating a modern view of religion and society. For Bonfil, the kabbalah paradoxically becomes the most effective mediator between medievalism and modernity, "an anchor" in the stormy seas aroused by the collapse of medieval systems of thought, and, simultaneously, "an agent of modernity." In penetrating the domains of the public sermon and the printing press (thus effectively reaching a wider audience), in stimulating radical revisions in Jewish liturgy and ceremonial practice, in instituting alternative times and places for Jewish prayer and study, and in fostering the proliferation of confraternities and their extra-synagogal activities, the kabbalah deeply affected the way Italian Jews related to both the religious and secular spheres of their lives. In fact, the growing demarcation of the two spheres, a clear mark of a modern consciousness, constituted the most profound change engendered by the new spirituality.[19] And, ironically, the kabbalah also encouraged a subtle but noticeable opening in Jewish-Christian interactions. The intellectuals of the ghetto produced Hebrew essays, drama, and poetry using standard baroque literary conventions. The seemingly "other worldly" kabbalists Moses Zacuto or Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto were capable of producing "this worldly" Hebrew drama replete with Christian metaphors, while other Jewish students of the kabbalah such as Abraham Yagel, Joseph Delmedigo, or Solomon Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea were highly conversant with contemporary science and integrated it within their kabbalistic systems of thought.[20] These new religious and cultural configurations, despite ghetto closure, were facilitated in no small part by the decisive impact of the kabbalah on Italian Jewish society.

My third and final example of the kabbalah as an agent of cultural and social change is taken from Eastern Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. The "crisis" of this period and that of the eighteenth century for Gershom Scholem was the threat posed to Jewish religious authority by the messianic movement of Shabbetai Ẓevi, especially

19. R. Bonfil, "Change in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis," *Jewish History* 3 (1988): 11-33 [Reprinted in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, 401-25]. See also his "Cultura e mistica a Venezia nel Cinquecento," in Cozzi, *Gli ebrei e Venezia*, 496-506.

20. See D. B. Ruderman, "The Language of Science as the Language of Faith: An Aspect of Italian Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Anniversary Volume in Honor of Shlomo Simonsohn*, forthcoming.

from the radical nihilist fringe among his followers. The ultimate denouement of this crisis was the birth of Ḥasidism, the popular pietistic movement emerging in the late eighteenth century, its neutralization of the extreme messianic element of Sabbatianism, and its own popular challenge to the rabbinic aristocracy of power and learning.[21]

Recent scholarship, as I have suggested, has challenged and refined many of Scholem's conclusions. I shall restrict myself to the revisions of two young scholars of Eastern European Jewry, Elhanan Reiner and Ze'ev Gries.[22] Scholem had argued that the messianic movement of Shabbatai Ẓevi was effective only because of the wide diffusion of the Lurianic kabbalah throughout the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. Moshe Idel and others have challenged the assumption that such an esoteric theosophy could take root in the soil of the seventeenth-century Jewish community beyond the reach of a small coterie of kabbalistic enthusiasts.[23] Gries examines the issue of the diffusion of Lurianic kabbalah by focusing on the popular literature of *hanhagot* (*regimen vitae*), guides to moral conduct, popularly conceived and abbreviated from earlier more complex compositions. He discovers that these small books inspired by Lurianic doctrines were widely circulated only after the Sabbatian movement had appeared and were spread primarily by the Sabbatians themselves. In other words, Lurianic kabbalah, contra Scholem, did not spread Sabbatianism but, instead, Sabbatianism spread popular forms of Lurianic doctrine among a wider laity. Addressing a new reading public with distinct spiritual needs unlike those of the elite, these practical guides of mystical morality were a huge success, reaching their greatest popularity at the time Ḥasidism first appeared.

Reiner's scholarship on the impact of the printing press on the modes of transmission of Ashkenazic culture parallels the work of Gries. Reiner describes the appearance in the seventeenth century of a non-canonical literature of new writers and new readers. He focuses especially on the appearance of popular preachers increasingly anxious to see their sermons in print, writing and speaking in a colorful and personalized style, and eager to reveal publicly kabbalistic secrets. The growing popularity of these small volumes, despite the attempts to limit them by the rabbinic establishment, testifies to the breaking of the hierarchy of power of the elites through the vehicle of the kabbalah now popularized in print. For both Reiner and Greis, this revolt of the laity, a stress on exotericism with respect to the divine secrets, preceded the Sabbatian and Hasidic

21. See the works cited above in note 8.

22. E. Reiner, "Itinerate Ashkenazic Preachers in the Early Modern Period" [Hebrew], forthcoming; idem, "The Historical Context of the Debate on *Pilpul*" [Hebrew], forthcoming, in a volume to be published by the Harvard Center for Jewish Studies; Z. Greis, *Sifrut Ha-Hanhagot: Toldedoteha u-Mekomah be-Ḥayyei Ḥasidov shel Ha-Besht* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1990).

23. See note 9 above.

movements. The latter were not the cause of this social struggle and cultural realignment but only their end result. We might only add that the continued debates over the "Sabbatian heresy" in the eighteenth century have less to do with messianism as Scholem once described them, and more to do with this same issue of exotericism, the popular dissemination of kabbalistic doctrine, and the subsequent threat posed to the established religious and lay leadership of European Jewry.[24]

Having considered the place of the kabbalah in Jewish religious tradition and having explored its impact in three discrete historical contexts from the end of the fifteenth until the eighteenth century, I conclude with three brief observations. The first example, the mutual study of the kabbalah by Christians and Jews in Pico's circle, left its mark on the intellectual and spiritual life of both faith communities, although its social impact was highly constricted. Social toleration did not accompany intellectual appreciation of books and ideas. The examples of the kabbalah's impact on Jewish society in the Italian ghetto and in Eastern Europe, on the other hand, suggest the decisive impact Jewish mystical experience could have upon a Jewish laity increasingly aware of its own power to challenge lay and rabbinic elites. The kabbalah in these contexts functioned as a kind of ideology of popular culture; its divine secrets were both substantially and symbolically wrested from the leadership and placed in the hands of the masses. The phenomenon I am describing, particularly the spread of a new spirituality through the agency of popular preachers and the printed book, undoubtedly has clear analogues among Protestant and Catholic reform movements in early modern Europe. Since we are only at the initial stages of charting this Jewish phenomenon, meaningful and precise comparisons have not yet been made, but clearly such comparisons are desirable and important for future study.

My final observation is to stress once again the unique Janus-like quality of the kabbalah in Judaism: its embeddedness in and reinforcement of traditional norms of religious and social behavior and, simultaneously, its radical potentiality, its hermeneutical pliability, and its ability to foster social and cultural change. One might argue that this same dialectical relationship between tradition and dissent similarly characterizes forms of mysticism and spirituality among other religions. I would submit, following Scholem's original insight, that Judaism through the kabbalah offers a most compelling example of a religious tradition that consciously and willingly subverts itself.

24. See, e.g., the recent volume of E. Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).